

CAMELLIAS



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Camellias are large evergreen shrubs (and small trees) that are prized for their beautiful blooms. The foliage is a dark, glossy green so the plant is attractive even when not in bloom.

Question: My landscape is so boring in the winter. Are there any plants that flower during these gray months?

Answer: Our climate here in the Umpqua Valley allows us to grow a wide range of plants, including some of the world's most beautiful flowering shrubs from the genus camellia.

Camellias are large evergreen shrubs (and small trees) that are prized for their beautiful blooms. The foliage is a dark, glossy green so the plant is attractive even when not in flower.

This genus is native to eastern and southern Asia. Camellias are revered in Asian culture and can live to be quite old. There are some around the emperor's palace in Japan that are estimated to be 500 years old.

The genus camellia contains over 200 species. The most common ones for home landscape use in Oregon are *C. japonica* and *C. sasanqua*.

Japonica can grow up to 25 feet tall, although most are in the 6 to 12 foot height range and width. It typically flowers in late winter into spring.

Sasanqua is an earlier bloomer and has slightly smaller leaves than *japonica*.

It has fragrant flowers.

There are over 2,300 named cultivars of camellias according to the American Camellia Society, so you should be able to find one that fits your conditions and preferences.

There is another species of camellia that many of us already have in our home — *C. sinensis* or tea camellia. This is the plant which provides tea leaves for the world!

The tea camellia has small white flowers that aren't showy, so it is not grown as an ornamental.

There is at least one commercial tea grower in

Oregon and if you are interested in growing tea for drinking, there is lots of information available on the web.

In general, camellias are slow growers. They prefer acidic, well-drained soil rich in organic matter (if you do well with rhododendrons, you'll be fine with camellias). They prefer to be sheltered from full sun and drying winds.

They are slow to become established, so it is important to maintain the moisture when they are newly planted. They are shallow-rooted and it helps to mulch them, once again like rhododendrons and azaleas.

Older plants can thrive in full sun when their leaf canopy can shade the root area.

As far as maintenance is concerned, they don't require much pruning. Remove damaged wood or to keep a shape, right after flowering.

Fertilize your camellia with a balanced fertilizer applied two-three times

from February to May.

They are susceptible to several insect pests, including aphids, scale and spider mites. Minor infestations can be removed with a hose (aphids) or insecticidal soap. Use of oil emulsion sprays can be effective with scale. Keeping your plants healthy is usually your best defense against pests.

Camellias can be used as a specimen plant, along borders or even make a screen. The Oregon Camellia Society has a list on their webpage of favorite species for Oregon in multiple categories.

Flowers come in such a wide array of colors and styles that there is sure to be a plant you would love for your winter landscape.

One added bonus: camellias make a great hummingbird habitat for those little hummers who hang out here all winter. They use the flowers for nectar and often nest in a camellia bush. Even though camellias are not a native plant, they provide food when there are few other plants available.

As we look out into our gray winter landscapes, why not do a little research on what kind of camellia you would like to add to your yard?

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.



There are over 200 species within the camellia genus, making for a variety of color and style of flower.